

Smooth Sailing For U.S., Japanese Naval Training

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan— Today, the submarine is your ally. You share information. You work together. Tomorrow, the same submarine is a deadly threat that must be detected and tracked down.

Same submarine, different day.

That's how it goes in Annual-Ex17G, a bilateral training between the U.S. and Japanese naval forces happening this week in the seas outside Japan.

Good guys and bad guys always are switching hats in the simulations, said Strike Group

Five chief of staff Capt. Dave Volonino.

"One day the ship may be friendly. The next day it becomes the enemy and we have to track and shoot it," Volonino said. "It makes for excellent training and a fun and exciting time."

Both sides are working together better than ever before, he said. The two navies have done this large-scale joint exercise since 1981, according to the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces.

But this year, they are demonstrating "unprecedented levels of interoperability," Volonino said.

"We're sharing a common tactical picture, so our navies can operate together," Volonino said.

The navies also share the day-to-day chores that keep the ships and the exercises running. Each side gets to see how the other half lives and works through a person switch. For example, someone in the JMSDF is paired up with a "running mate" and doing that person's job on a U.S. ship. About 80 Japanese navy personnel are aboard the Kitty Hawk this week, said JMSDF spokesperson Nao Yajimoto.

"They are working hard," Yajimoto said. "They don't look like they are sleeping." AnnualEx is scheduled to last a little more than a week, ending on Nov. 18. Most of the 8,500 U.S. Navy personnel participating in the exercise are on the Kitty Hawk, which then is to visit Hong Kong and South Korea before returning to Yokosuka, said Lt. Cmdr. Keith Patton.

At almost 45 years old, the Kitty Hawk may be the Navy's oldest aircraft carrier but it appears to be holding its own in AnnualEx, he said.

"I'm not sure how it stacks up to last year because I wasn't here," Patton said. "But I know the Kitty Hawk has not been sunk yet."